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NEWS RELEASE

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Movement, or More of the Same?
by Senator Larry Craig

As 2007 winds down, we can begin to look back on the last 12 months of Democrat control of Congress. While the year began with calls for bipartisanship and cooperation, the end has seen anything but these. The picture isn't pretty.

One of Congress' primary responsibilities is to control "the purse strings," which is done through appropriations legislation. As I write this, Congress has only sent one of 12 appropriations bills to the president for his signature. In the last 22 years, Congress has never failed to pass more than one free standing appropriations bill, like they have this year. It is an unfortunate record of futility.

In the 2006 elections, Democrats ran as the "party of fiscal responsibility," but at every turn, they have reverted to form, seeking to raise taxes, raise spending, or both. They've had almost a year to demonstrate their fiscal responsibility by showing America what kind of appropriations bills they pass, and consequently, what kind of spending levels they support. But here we are, more than two months after fiscal year 2008 has started, and very few federal agencies even know what their budget will be for the year.

Instead of springing to action, however, Democrat leaders waste time trying to figure out ways to use the appropriations bills as leverage to force a withdrawal of troops from Iraq. Because Congress hasn't approved supplemental funding for Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Defense will soon begin running out of funds. Just days before Christmas, DoD may have to lay off 100,000 civilian employees in order to have enough funds to supply the troops in harm's way.

As if this weren't enough, Congressional Democrats have also had a devil of a time trying to approve a patch to keep millions of Americans from being hit by the oppressive Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT). Without the patch, millions of middle-class taxpayers will fall under the AMT this year. But even though these higher AMT taxes haven't been collected in years, Democrats still insist that the government has to raise taxes elsewhere to pay for the patch. Sounds like "Beltway logic" to me.

Several months ago, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulsen notified Congressional leaders that if an AMT patch wasn't approved by mid-November, it would cause income tax returns to be delayed in the spring.

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Throughout the year, the House and Senate have voted in the neighborhood of 60 times on Iraq-related measures. But they won't put in the effort to put together an AMT fix that both Republicans and Democrats can support. Because of that unwillingness or inability to compromise, the IRS estimates as many as 50 million American families will have \$75 billion in tax returns delayed by as much as seven weeks. That's money out of your pocket, and that is bad for the U.S. economy.

I'm hopeful that House and Senate Democrats have learned from the challenges we have seen in the first session of the 110th Congress. The American people understand the difference between symbolic value and substantive achievement. If Democrats in Congress continue to choose conflict over compromise, voters might be ready for a little change next November.